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WOMEN  
ON THE FARM

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.



# Women on the Farm

AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE  
*Woman's Committee, Council of National Defense*  
MAY 13, 1918, WASHINGTON, D. C.

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*Delivered by*  
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*Assistant Secretary of Agriculture*

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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# Women on the Farm

By CLARENCE OUSLEY

*Assistant Secretary of Agriculture*

**I**T is no mere gallantry of sex, but an acknowledgment of fact, to say that in this war emergency, as in all the crises of our history and of the race, there is nothing finer in spirit or effect than the service which the women of the United States are rendering. In her very nature woman is an instrument of sacrifice. By circumstance and habit, and perhaps also by nature, she is accustomed to self-effacement. As a rule her chief thought is the thing to be accomplished; her least thought is her own welfare. The greatest factor of success in war is sacrifice—not the sacrifice of burnt offering but the sacrifice of comfort, of well-being, and, if need be, of self.

Hence it is that woman entered the war already trained in the psychology of war as it governs or influences personal conduct. It is not her privilege to engage in the adventures of war, to perform the thrilling feats on land and sea and in the air which make war appeal to the mind of the animal man as a great emprise, and which in some degree compensate him for his sufferings and sacrifices.

*Necessity  
of  
Sacrifice*

*Not the  
Spectacular*

*The Favored Service*

There is a vast difference between serving even in the trenches and serving behind the lines, between fighting man to man and fighting disease in the hospitals or hunger in the kitchens, and the difference to the manly man or the courageous woman lies not, as the cowardly and the low-minded imagine, in favor of the sheltered service but in favor of the battling service, where force matches force and mind clashes with mind, and the grim business takes on the nature of rivalry if not of sport. I can imagine every brave woman in the United States in these times wishing she were a man, and I can excuse the wish because every hour I am wishing that I were younger. Yet I know there is service for the elders and for the physically less fit, and that it is unmanly to repine.

*To Save Freedom*

So I bring you the assurance that your service is none the less vital, and that you are doing a part which, if not the greater part, is assuredly not the lesser part of this big task we have undertaken to save our Republic, to save freedom in the world, and even to save the German race from the utter bestiality to which it is committed by its barbaric rulers.

I am asked to say something about what women may do in producing food to sustain our people, our armies, and the armies and peoples of those who are fighting with us.

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## W O M E N   O N   T H E   F A R M

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This is the big job back of the lines. We have now two million men under arms; millions more are engaged, directly or indirectly, in work related to war; and while the farm has lost only a small percentage of its man-power in the draft, it has lost a considerable share of its labor by the demands of industries and by the lure of cities, and yet it is called upon to increase its harvests; and the harvests must be increased or there will be privation here and maybe hunger over there, where hunger spells ruin to civilization.

*The Job  
Over Here*

To come directly to the point, to state the case bluntly without further analysis, there is need for the mobilization of additional labor to supply the farmers with their needs for the particular days or weeks of seasonal strain in cultivation and harvest. Responding to the Nation's appeals, the farmers last year increased their plantings beyond those of any preceding year, and this year are further increasing their plantings. They are planting more than they will perhaps be able to cultivate without increments of labor now and then, and certainly more than they will be able to harvest without increments when the fields are ready for the harvest. Reports come to the Department of Agriculture that in many regions the farmers are working until black dark, they are foregoing their Saturday

*Farmers  
Need Help*

half-holiday, and their families are making the most of every hour of daylight. What additional help can be provided in these circumstances? Let us understand that additional help must be provided, for we can not afford to default in food production.

*Wasted  
Man-Power*      In the first place, there are many able-bodied men in the towns and cities doing utterly useless things for their own comfort or the comfort of other people who are financially able to employ their services. There are thousands of men checking hats, brushing clothes, carrying hand baggage, running pleasure automobiles, sprinkling lawns, and announcing visitors, who represent a sinful waste of energy in a time when every ounce of energy is needed. It is against the fashion in England, France, and Italy to employ useless servants. Women set the fashion. The example of social leaders, with the indorsement of organized women, would speedily put an end to indulgences which to the right-minded and the patriotic must soon appear as vulgar and wicked.

*The  
Unmanly  
Job*      In the next place, there are thousands of men in the towns and cities doing things that women can do as well. There are men cooks, men waiters, men clerks, men bookkeepers, whose places might well be filled by women. This is a situation not so easily affected by a

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## W O M E N   O N   T H E   F A R M

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decree of fashion, and yet it is none the less subject to an irresistible influence which woman can instantly exercise. The man does not live who can resist the scorn of his fellow-men; much less can he resist the scorn of womankind. It has come to pass already that the coward who tries to evade military duty without a good reason finds no favor among his women friends. It would be quite becoming if the women of the land, in a discriminating and just way, would visit their unspoken, but none the less sufficient, condemnation upon the man who is not in the true sense doing a man's job.

*Scorn the  
Evader*

With the relief of man-power by the suspension of useless service and by the substitution of women in tasks which woman can readily perform, there will remain more to be done upon the farm, and there is opportunity from time to time for women to work on the land. It would be extremely unfortunate, I think, if we should get the notion or herald the idea that we have come to such a pass in the United States that we must drive our women to the farms. As God made woman a little finer in spirit than man, so he made her a little fraailer in body. She can endure more suffering, perhaps, but as a rule she lacks the physical strength and endurance for the hard labor from sunup to sundown that constitutes the day's work on the farm.

*Men  
First*

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*The  
Farm  
Slacker*

I will despise American manhood if the great body of our men permit our women to be drafted for these hard tasks of agriculture until we have sent every able-bodied creature in breeches to the trenches or driven him to the fields, but women are to be encouraged, so far as their physical condition will permit or the circumstances surrounding them will advise, to engage in the lighter tasks of the farm, particularly in dairy work, in vegetable cultivation, and in fruit harvesting. Well-planned undertakings to this end should be stimulated, provided only that we do not fall into hysterics about it, that we do not undertake the impossible, that we do not create the impression of exhaustion of man-power, and, most important of all, that we do not encourage physical slackers to keep the shady and sheltered places while our women take the sun and the rain.

*Women  
in  
Agriculture*

However, let me remind you that there is a considerable army of women already in the field of agriculture. The Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the land-grant colleges in all the States, maintains a service of home demonstration in domestic science and arts in 1,675 out of 2,957 counties in the United States. This service is conducted by 1,150 trained women who are in the homes of the farmers, teaching them better ways of living, showing them new methods of conserva-

tion, and making the farm home a point of as much concern in the interest of health and comfort as the farm establishment from the standpoint of profit.

These leaders last year taught 1,900,000 women and girls to can and dry vegetables and fruits. The girls under instruction canned over 14,000,000 containers, and the women more than 35,000,000 containers. At the minimum wholesale price of these products their value aggregated more than \$7,000,000, and the recorded activities represent only a part of what was accomplished under the leadership of these women employed by the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges last year in the production and conservation of fruits and vegetables. There are in the pantries of the United States to-day more of such products than there ever were before, and every container represents an equal amount of commercial pack released for transportation across the sea. This service is in its infancy, so to speak. Within another four or five years I do not doubt that it will be extended to every agricultural county in the United States and to many of the cities. Its accomplishments will be multiplied manyfold if the women of the land, through group action and local organization, would accept and put into practice the teachings of these leaders.

*Filled  
Pantries*

*The  
Small  
Service*

It is hard for many people to understand that a national accomplishment is the sum of individual accomplishments, that the aggregate of the millions of bushels or pounds of increased production or of decreased consumption is composed of the few bushels or few pounds produced or conserved by the individual. Too many people are trying to serve the country by doing something spectacular, especially by coming to Washington or by going to Europe. The service that we most need now is the service of individual performance in our own homes, in our own business, and in our own neighborhoods.

*The  
Farmers'  
Wives*

But there is another vastly greater army of women already on the land, and they are doing a man's share of agricultural production and conservation. I speak of the six or seven millions of farmers' wives. Most of our publicists and leaders have forgotten them. Most of them are in the kitchen before daylight and long after dark; they cook and sew, and generally they wash, often even for the hired men; they cultivate the gardens; they care for the poultry; they make the butter, and often they work in the fields. I have seen them hoeing in the hot sun while their babies lay in the shade of near-by trees. They are truly and to the limit of their strength and their marvelous patience the helpmeets of their

husbands. They are the world's strictest economists, and its most heavily laden burden-bearers, for while they take on the burdens of vocation they do not lay down the burdens of sex; they bear children and they grow old prematurely.

I can imagine no finer thing for a city woman to do in this war emergency than to go to the farm for the harvest or for some other period of labor strain to help her country sister bear these burdens of kitchen and farm. Any good woman would keep house for a sick friend; the nurses in France are scrubbing floors in hospitals. It seems to me that some of the splendid zeal of our American city women to render war service might find satisfaction in the farm homes.

I do not undertake to prescribe any precise method of organization or mobilization, or to set any limit upon the activities of women in the field of agriculture. I have tried merely to tell you something of the problems as I see them. I have full faith that when the women of America address themselves seriously and sympathetically to this problem, as they have addressed themselves to other problems within the sphere of their particular responsibility, or within the range of their particular fitness, they will work out methods far more efficient than the mind of mere man can conceive.

*Help a  
Farm  
Woman*

*Women's  
Problem*

*The  
Large  
Hope*   It will be a blessed thing if out of this trial and the occupational and economic readjustments to which we must resort we can establish a new relation or revive an old relation between the town woman and the country woman; if we can make farm home life more comfortable; if we can make city home life more wholesome; if we can get into the country something more of the city's spirit of aspiration, and if we can get into the city something more of the country's spirit of humility; if we can take to the country the order and the progress of the city, and if we can take to the city the freshness and the fragrance of the country. I venture the suggestion that such an undertaking of blessing and beauty will yield a richer accomplishment under the acknowledged instinct of woman than under the boasted philosophy of man.







